

**CITY OF GAHANNA
PARKS & RECREATION BOARD
MINUTES – October 3, 2007**

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Luke Messinger called the Meeting of the Parks and Recreation Board to order on Wednesday, October 3, 2007 at 7:00 pm at the City of Gahanna.

ROLL CALL:

Present: Diane Cantrell
Marlene Eader
Luke Messinger
Dot Micacchion
Eric Miller

In attendance from the City Administration was Tony Collins, Director and Troy Euton, Deputy Director, Department of Parks & Recreation.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Micacchion made a **MOTION** to approve the August 1, 2007 meeting minutes; seconded by Eader. **On roll call vote:** Messinger, Yes, Micacchion, Yes, Miller, Yes, Cantrell, Yes, and Eader, Yes. **The motion carried 5-0.**

Discussion; Board member Cantrell noted that on page two; Old Business; Dog Park Advisory Committee motion – motion vote should be: Motion carried 5 – 2 and was approved.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Miller made a **MOTION** to approve the October 3, 2007 agenda; seconded by Cantrell. **On roll call vote:** Micacchion, Yes, Miller, Yes, Cantrell, Yes, Eader, Yes and Messinger, Yes. **The motion carried 5 – 0.**

VISITORS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lynne Vermillion 647 Ridenour Road Gahanna, Ohio

HEARING OF VISITORS

Lynne Vermillion 647 Ridenour Road Gahanna, Ohio stated that on October 1, 2007; Gahanna City Council approved the initial funding for the Dog Park. The Westie Walk will be on October 13, 2007 and on October 20, 2007 12 – 3 pm will be the Pooch Playground Howl-N-Whine Party location to be determined.

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:**Woodside Green South Pond**

Tony Collins stated he received a request from a resident living adjacent to Woodside Green South pond regarding catch and release fishing only. Half of the pond is owned by the residents adjacent to the pond and the remainder of the pond is owned by the city. The resident request the city owned section of the pond be catch and release only. The Department of Parks & Recreation staff does not have any objections to making it a catch and release pond; however the staff is concerned about enforcement. The city attorney has stated that the Department could put a catch and release sign on its side of the pond. Woodside Green pond has catch and release signs posted.

After some discussion the Board decided they would like to make a site visit to Woodside Green South Pond before making a decision.

Youth Softball

Messinger explained that many concerns have been raised to the Department of Parks & Recreation and the Mayor's office regarding the number, quality and availability of softball fields in Gahanna. Messinger stated this meeting is to seek information regarding the issue; no decisions can be made at this meeting.

Collins stated that three years ago a parent began talking about the need for youth softball fields and when there are tournaments they have to go to four locations to play. The city needs a softball complex; how we are going to make it happen, how we are going to get the funds.

Collins explained the Parks & Recreation office and the Mayor receives request monthly regarding community needs; whether it is bike ways, safe routes to school, paths, fishing, dogs, baseball, football, softball, etc. The challenge is to allocate our funds in terms of priorities; when are we going to spend money, how many of the needs are we able to meet.

In 2006 the city adopted a Parks & Recreation Master Plan. The plan was created by surveying residents and conducting focus groups. The master plan identified priorities for recreation/facility needs for the community. The Department of Parks & Recreation proposes its yearly budget based on the priorities identified in the Master Plan. Number one on the list with 81% of the citizens responding there is a need to develop additional walking or bike trails and connecting existing trails. Number two on the list with 68% of the citizens responding there is a need for additional restroom facilities at the city parks. Number eight on the list with 45% of the citizens responding there is a need to build a complex for baseball or softball. Softball has been identified as a need; we know there is a need. Our performance in the past three years in terms of recreational trails, we just passed additional funding for trails; we have been focused on trails.

Additional restrooms; we have added many restrooms; or have opened up and installed security systems allowing the restrooms to open longer. Parking has been a priority at all our athletic complexes.

Some things do not make the list. The studies are effective; however some things come up along the way; you cannot always depend on these types of things. There are projects that jump up on the priority list based on an urgent situation; the parking lot at McCorkle took priority due to the limited number of spaces and the amount of cars at any given event.

The baseball soft ball needs were looked at; the league representatives were present in the planning and discussion of renovating Academy Park by adding parking, double the size of the playgrounds and making it a more useable complex.

Pizzurro Park has adult softball fields which are located in the flood plain. Pizzurro Park is not a good park for an athletic complex.

It takes 35 acres to build a softball complex with four fields, restrooms, concession, parking, etc. There are not 35 acres available to purchase in the City of Gahanna or that the city already owns.

There are 27 baseball/softball fields in Gahanna; of which ten are owned by the City of Gahanna (7 Academy, 2 Woodside Green and 1 at Hannah Farms) and 17 are owned by the school system. The city has field use agreements with the youth sports leagues. The Parks & Recreation staff and league representatives meet each year to discuss the field use agreement and priorities for the upcoming season. When the city leases fields it allows the league to allocate the use of the fields. The department does not have staff available to schedule the fields. The leagues manage the facilities.

The city skinned the fields, and is trying to improve the building and have plans to replace the playground at Academy Park.

In terms of softball use; one of the city fields is used and the other three fields are school fields. The Midwest regional average of softball fields are 1/6,000 residents; the city is currently at 1/9,000 including Pizzurro; once the fields are gone at Pizzurro the number will be even lower. However the fields at Pizzurro Park have never been used for youth softball. The only youth teams that have used Pizzurro Park are Gahanna Christian; who has rented the fields.

The current plan is to remove the fields from Pizzurro Park, keeping it a family park and adding a dog park.

The city plan is to work with the schools as a back up to give us some fields to run our leagues on for the short term. Until we can supply an adult field to replace our usage needs. Current ideas are looking at the land the city owns in the Southwest floodplain and land we are trying to acquire. It is an idea at this point; we don't know if it will be feasible; due to it being in the floodplain and we currently do not own all the land.

Justin Sanford, Athletic Director at Gahanna Lincoln High School spoke regarding the school plans for the renovation of athletic fields. The school has a three phase plan for renovating fields. The first phase was to get a turf surface at the high school stadium so that the district could look at reallocating usage at Gahanna Middle School South (GMSS) site where the current soccer facility is and two softball diamonds. The second phase is replacing some bleachers at the stadium. The third phase is the softball needs. The school considered a wagon wheel approach to a softball complex at GMSS. They also considered taking the varsity and JV diamonds that are behind the school and relocate them to the current soccer fields at GMSS. The school could fit two softball diamonds back to back; however they would not be in the wagon wheel approach. It would be a square with two softball diamonds and include renovating two of the current diamonds.

The original plan was to take the five diamonds and turn them into four. After conversations with Tony Collins and finding out the needs of the city and the youth softball programs the school is looking at some ways to keep the fields at the high school. The school has to raise the funds to complete the renovation of the softball fields. As of right now the three diamonds behind the high school are still there and still planning on being there the two diamonds at GMSS are still there untouched. Nothing can be done until the money is raised.

Question from the audience – in the interim period we are not losing a field, but in the long run we are losing a field.

Sanford stated; that if there is a need an adjustment can be made to keep the two diamonds forever, they will not have fences in the outfields in order for the school to use them for practice fields for other sports and the band. Until the city started discussions the school did not know there was this need for softball fields in the city. The school is willing to work and reshape the plans.

Collins explained that the city depends on the special interest groups and volunteers for the larger organizations to be the voice of the organizations. When we are looking at the needs of the community we look at working together with the school system to meet the needs of the community so that we maximize the tax payer dollars so that the citizens are not double paying for things. The city counts on the groups to communicate those needs. Aside from one resident e-mailing Collins once every few months over the past three years the board of Jr. League baseball and softball has not come forward to the city to express problems with softball.

Audience objection - regarding not being approached. Collins stated that there was a planning meeting to discuss the future plans, aside from that meeting the Jr league board has not brought it up.

Audience comment – there was not an issue like this until the school decides to make brand new fields and the fields at Pizzurro will be taken away.

Collins comment Pizzurro was not in the equation. As soon as the softball fields became an issue the first thing the city did was call a meeting together that included

Justin, P & R staff and a representative of the Jr. league organization. The discussion was regarding a misunderstanding of what was going on and the allocation of fields and what is gone. Collins wanted to understand what the school plans were. At the meeting it was determined what was needed and what could be allocated for the need.

The City wanted to communicate that it is aware of the need due to the loss of these fields and are moving forward to produce a solution to the need. It is going to cost money, the school and the city does not have the \$400k dollars needed to build the complex.

Audience comment – it will not solve the problem taking fields away from baseball to give to softball.

Audience comment – for several years there have been discussions about softball at Academy and have been turned down due to the promises made to the homeowners.

Audience comment – the problem is the city might have ten fields; of those ten fields nine of them have pitching hills and/or grass infields. There is only one of those ten fields that can be used for fast pitch softball. That field is so tiny that no one over the age of ten can play on it. The city does not have fields for fast pitch softball.

Audience comment - The issue that set everybody off was changing Pizzurro to a dog park and the city going to the school and asking the school to use fields when Gahanna Jr. League has had exclusive rights to the fields for years. The scheduling between the rec league; travel and tournament is what started the issue. The complex will be great once it is completed; but when you take two city fields away and then go to the school and request to be included in the scheduling up.

Collins stated that at the meeting with the schools which included a member of the Jr. League sports representative.

Audience comment – the school fields are very specific to children; and you are talking about allowing adult softball leagues to use the schools fields which are designed; built and should be used for the kids; use them for the adult athletic programs is very concerning.

Sanford stated the school and the city did not agree to anything; the meeting was a brain storming session as in what fields there are; who uses it; are there any fields that have do not have a fence that could accommodate adult softball. The school is willing to work any way possible to accommodate everybody.

Collins stated an easy solution to the field issues would be to remove all the pitchers mounds, re-grade all the infields so anyone can use all the fields. However, Collins stated that within the Jr. League Sports organization there is an issue of representation of softball. The city counts on the one point of contact with each league to represent the whole league.

Collins reiterated Sanford's' comment that the city and school did not make any

agreements and the city would never bump the youth sports off the fields. The city and the school are still in discussions.

Public Comment

Brian Anderson, 599 Moss Oak Ave, Gahanna Ohio 43230; Anderson expressed concern about the city pushing softball off onto school fields. The city provides nice fields for baseball, soccer, football, Skate Park and Dog Park. Softball has travel teams and an 80 team tournament that has 900 players every year; no other youth sport brings in this kind of money to the city with hotel, restaurants and shopping. They are shipped all over the city.

Regarding the ten fields, only one is a softball field and the fences are so short it is for ten and under. There are not girl softball fields provided by Gahanna. Anderson stated he has been asking for a solution for over five years.

Anderson's three minutes passed; Micacchion made a **MOTION** to extend two additional minutes; seconded by Cantrell. **On roll call vote:** Cantrell, Yes, Eader, Yes, Messenger, yes, Micacchion, Yes and Miller, Yes. **Motion carried 5 – 0 and was approved.**

Anderson continued; this is not a new issue, something needs to be done by the city other than schools. This is a rights issue for the girls and title 9 applies to this situation.

Judy Troutman, 441 Springwood Lake Drive, Gahanna Ohio 43230; Troutman stated that in regards to using the school fields for the softball tournaments is great; however there are issues with the concessions and the quality of the restroom facilities. We have tried to take that money and invest it back into the Gahanna Jr. League. It is becoming difficult and it is a health code issue; to have concessions at some of the school fields. We want to understand what the plans are. Troutman expressed concerns that there are still no definitive plans; no time table, no dates and there are a lot of other actions being planned to move things around.

The dog park is being moved and it is not in the master plan as a priority; this is a side note how you look at the master plan. It is important to consider the equality issue and equal rights in the title 9 concerns; that has to do with understanding more about the funding. It is a legitimate concern because is it federal funding directly or indirectly through state through any state agency that does receive federal funding. So potential it is an equal right issue for the city. There are approximately 1,300 kids in Jr. League sports; about 800-850 are boys; 350 – 400 are girls. They really have one legitimate softball field and 30% of your participants are girls; and that is less than 10% of the fields are for softball. This is without the school fields. Other cities that are comparable to the size of Gahanna; Reynoldsburg has 14 city diamonds all dual purpose fields; Worthington has nine, Dublin has 11, all but a couple of those are lighted fields, Westerville has 14, Whitehall has 8 fields and host one of the premier softball tournaments in the state. Gahanna's tournament is trying to get to that level and attract the same quality.

Troutman's three minutes passed; Miller made a **MOTION** to extend two additional

minutes; seconded by Cantrell. . **On roll call vote:** Cantrell, Yes, Eader, Yes, Messinger, yes, Micacchion, Yes and Miller, Yes. **Motion carried 5 – 0 and was approved.**

Troutman continued; this needs to be treated seriously as an equality issue. This needs to be a high priority. The feeder program into the schools cannot continue to be developed without better facilities. The girls will go to other programs or school districts.

Paul Zink, 378 Forestwood, Gahanna, Ohio 43230; Zink would like further clarification on the timeframe for finishing Academy Park. What is the expenditure plan and who at the city can provide the information on what federal funding the city is receiving through its various departments.

Collins stated that the plans were designed to be completed within ten years based on the funding availability. There is a five year capital plan that is submitted to Council every year. Academy Park renovation has been split into phases. Until this year Hannah Park was on the top of the list based on its condition and continued getting bumped back; however we were able to get it in as part of the bond program this year. Collins stated he respects title 9 and does not believe that title 9 applies here. However; the city still wants to be able to provide the service if able to in the best way. Parks & Recreation does not receive any direct funds from the federal government. The department has received some state funds that may be supplied by federal funds. Maybe some of the highway projects are federally funded.

Mayor Stinchcomb stated the question needs to be directed to the City Attorney Tom Weber.

Zink questioned why the city relies on the league to allocate field space, it is city property; he believes the city still has some oversight on the usage.

Collins stated a possible solution would be for the city to tell Jr. League that 30% of the fields leased to you must be used for softball. The city does have the ability to do.

Tracy Jorden, 855 E. Longview Ave, Columbus Ohio; Jorden stated her children live in Gahanna and attend Gahanna schools. Jorden stated she has been in the league for over 12 years as a coach, commissioner, vice president board member. The representation between the city and the Jr league; the city has been good to the league in regards to offering places to hold the offices. Jorden stated Collins has been open to discussion items with the league. The last meeting was over a year and a half ago; personally she did not contact the city prior to last week since she heard the rumors and took them as rumors. She has been in contact with the schools to see what was going on and found out that there was nothing definitive. The thing that upset her the most was that the city was coming to the schools to use the fields for adult sports leagues. There are not enough fields to schedule the softball leagues and the tournaments.

Jorden's three minutes passed; Micacchion made a **MOTION** to extend two additional minutes; seconded by Miller. **On roll call vote:** Eader, Yes, Messinger, Yes,

Micacchion, Yes, Miller, Yes and Cantrell, Yes **Motion carried 5 – 0 and was approved.**

Jorden continued; when there are tournaments and high school games it is embarrassing to play on our fields; whether they are school or city. Other communities have nicer facilities that the city provides and takes care of. This city needs to do something and quick for girl's softball. Jorden feels that it should not take ten years to get it done. We have been fighting for this for years; this is needed for the kids soon coming up.

Mayor Stinchcomb thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. The biggest challenge for the city is funding. The City of Gahanna does not have the tax base of Dublin. Dublin has 6 city employees for everyone one the City of Gahanna has. The city does not have the budge of Westerville. Gahanna City taxes have not been increased for 30 years. Parks & Recreation spending has increased dramatically, land purchases have increased. All the money comes out of the general fund, the entire city is run on \$36 million a year; with half of the money going to run the police department. The city is doing its very best. For the first time in 30 years the city put together a \$10 million bond fund. The city borrowed money to start doing some projects that the city did not have the funds for; including the restrooms and trail facilities.

Mayor Stinchcomb stated that it is vital for the city to have a relationship with the school. Possible there needs to be a private/public/school partnership in order to raise funds and possible a relationship with Jefferson Township in order to find the land to put in fields. The city will do the best it can.

At this time the Board took a ten minute recess.

Academy Park

Collins stated that the city has elected to put a moratorium on cell towers until the city can address several issues that were raised. The Parks department has all the playground equipment and ready for installation at Academy Park. The department needs to know where to place the playground. When the cell tower is brought forward again and we put the playground in the same location as the current playground, the Board will have to propose a new location in the park for the cell tower. The department needs a recommendation from the Board on the placement of the playground.

Cantrell made a **MOTION** that the playground at Academy Park be installed in the same location where the current playground is located; seconded by Micacchion. **On roll call vote:** Messinger, Yes, Micacchion, Yes, Miller, Yes, Eader, Yes and Cantrell, Yes. **Motion carried 5 – 0 and was approved.**

Donation and Fee Waiver Review

Collins requested that the Parks & Recreation staff be given authorization to approve donation request on behalf of the Board following the guidelines the Board approved.

The donation request granted will be reported out in the Directors Report each month and on a yearend report.

Micacchion made a **MOTION** that the Parks & Recreation staff will approve donation request and report donations given; seconded by Miller. **On roll call vote:** Micacchion, Yes, Miller, Yes, Messinger, Yes, Cantrell, Yes and Eader, Yes. **Motion carried 5- 0 and was approved.**

CORRESPONDENCE AND ACTIONS

None

DIRECTORS REPORT

Collins distributed the Director's Report, which includes the highlights from the month of September.

Collins stated the transition and the closing date for Hannah Farms Park have been postponed to November 30, 2007.

COMMITTEES' REPORT

Bikeway Advisory Committee

Council approved the allocation of funds for the Big Walnut Trail plan submitted by Floyd Brown Engineering. The Committee is going to look at tactical projects and strategic planning in terms of getting the revision of the bikeway done in house. The committee has submitted the Safe Routes to School grant. If the Committee receives the grant they will form an action committee that will be the safe routes to school committee and they will bring in school representatives and community members.

Community Improvement Corporation (C.I.C.)

Cantrell stated the SID program is on target. The consultant is interviewing residents and business. The grant reviews are in process.

Creekside Development Team meeting

Micacchion stated the team took a tour of Creekside. The grand opening will be in early 2008.

Natural Resource Advisory Committee

A written report of Pizzurro Parks has been submitted.

Dog Park Advisory Committee

Micacchion stated the Committee had their initial meeting. The next meeting will be on October 10, 2007 at Pizzurro Park. The committee will walk the site and elect officers. Micacchion expressed the Dog Park Advisory Committee would like a recommendation from the Board to add a representative from the Pooch Playground, Inc. (PPI). PPI has put a lot of money, time and commitment into the dog park. The Dog Park Advisory Committee feels that the representative does not need to be a resident of the City of Gahanna.

Eader made a **MOTION** that the Dog Park Advisory Committee adds a representative

from the Pooch Playground, Inc. The representative may or may not be a Gahanna resident; seconded by Cantrell. **On roll call vote:** Miller, Yes, Micacchion, Yes, Cantrell, Yes, Eader, Yes and Messinger, Yes. **Motion carried 5 – 0 and was approved.**

Foundation Committee

Collins distributed the draft By-Laws and a giving program for a Gahanna Parks & Recreation Foundation for the Boards review. The Articles of Incorporation still need to be completed. The Board will discuss further at another meeting.

Veterans Memorial Committee

No updates at this time

POLL MEMBERS FOR COMMENT:

None

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business to come before the Parks & Recreation Board at this time, Cantrell made a **MOTION** to adjourn; seconded by Miller. The motion carried, unanimously.

The Parks & Recreation Board meeting adjourned at 9:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Pam Crossmock, Administrative Assistant

Approved this _____ day of _____, 2007

Luke Messinger, Chair